



MY VOICE LONDON

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

The Trustees and team of My Voice London recognise that we have a responsibility to protect the children with whom we work. This policy sets out the procedures that we have put in place to ensure that all possible steps are taken in a timely and appropriate manner to enable us to achieve this.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

My Voice London believes that:

- The welfare of the child is paramount;
- All children without exception have the right to protection from abuse;
- Child protection covers children and young people up to the age of 18 years after that the young person has the option of contacting the Police to report a criminal assault, the young person could be supported in this action by My Voice London;
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately and
- All My Voice London's trustees, staff and volunteers have a responsibility to report concerns

(Drawn from the recommendations from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Save The Children UK in conjunction with the Charity Commission).

PROCEDURES

My Voice London will take all reasonable steps within our power to safeguard the children with whom we work. Specifically we will:

Staff and Volunteers

1. Check all staff and volunteers using:

- interviews
- obtaining references
- obtaining Disclosure Checks through the Criminal Record Bureau (CRB).

Interviews and obtaining references will take place before staff and volunteers begin working with My Voice London. Continuing delays to the CRB process will mean that on occasions it will be necessary for staff to take up employment before the check is obtained. In these circumstances the member of staff will not work alone on a one to one basis with children until the check has been obtained. The delays to the CRB process can also mean lengthy delays in the recruitment of mentors. Where the needs of the child mean that an early match with a mentor is required and the CRB check on that mentor has not yet been obtained, the mentoring may continue on the condition that the mentor is accompanied at all sessions by a member of My Voice London staff who has been CRB checked.

Trustees

2. My Voice London will undertake a CRB check on those of our Trustees who are not employed in education. Agreement to this check will be a condition of appointment as a Trustee. Trustees who work in education (schools, LEA) will not be CRB checked by My Voice London as the assumption will be that they are cleared by their employing LEA (Kingston or Merton).

Employers working with children and young people on curriculum projects

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3. My Voice London will NOT conduct checks on employers working with children and young people on curriculum projects (i.e. visiting classrooms, receiving visits to their workplaces). Such employers are considered to have one off or very short term contact and only with groups of children in the company of other adults. Wherever possible My Voice London accompanies employers in such circumstances in order to support them and ensure the quality of the event – in such circumstances the presence of the My Voice London team member will act as a further safeguard. In all such contact with the employer the school will have the primary responsibility for safeguarding their pupils and should ensure that a teacher is present at all times.

Child Protection Training

4. Child Protection Training will be provided to all mentors and all My Voice London staff.

Action to be taken should any concerns arise.

5. If a child reports to a mentor or member of staff that they are experiencing abuse or the mentor or staff member sees signs that suggest that abuse may be taking place (see annex for briefing on abuse and its signs) the following procedures must be followed:

- The adult MUST NOT seek evidence of that abuse, encourage the child to talk about it or ask leading questions. It is the role of social services to investigate such concerns and inappropriate questioning by others can jeopardise this process.
- Any questions in these circumstances must therefore be limited to broad and open questions – for example 'how was your weekend?'
- If a child does confide in the mentor or My Voice London staff member, that adult MUST immediately tell the child that the law (Children's Act) requires them to report the matter.
- Once the session with the child has finished the adult must immediately write a full account of the conversation. This will normally be written before reporting to the relevant My Voice London manager except if the situation is of the utmost urgency and the child is in immediate danger.

6. Anyone who has knowledge, or suspects that a child is suffering significant harm, or is at risk of significant harm MUST IMMEDIATELY report their concerns to the relevant member of the My Voice London team as follows:

- MENTORS – to a member of the My Voice London mentoring team
- My Voice London staff (including concerns reported by mentors) to Gillian Morris, the designated Child Protection Officer. If she is unavailable the concerns should be reported to Terri Trinder, or again in her absence to Tope Hunter.

7. If the young person/child discloses an abuse whilst in school and the adult feels he/she is in immediate danger (i.e., doesn't want to go home because he/she is frightened) it must be reported to the Child Protection Officer in the school; failing this, it should be reported to a senior member of staff immediately; the child should be encouraged to accompany the mentor but if the child wishes to return to class he/she should be allowed to do so and the mentor must notify My Voice London as a matter of urgency. All information will then be passed on to Social Services

Please note if mentoring sessions are taking place after school hours (i.e. in the library) and the young person/child discloses an abuse then the mentor should go with he/her to the nearest police station or ring the local police station.

The Child Protection Officer, or person acting on his/her behalf will report the concerns to either the child's school (or if permanently excluded to the LEA Social Inclusion Unit). If

the Child Protection Officer needs advice on the action to take he/she should contact the LEA Social Inclusion Unit.

What happens next?

The Local Authority is under a duty to investigate referrals for alleged child abuse, they are evaluated on the day they are received where an assigned social worker and their manager decide whether emergency action is needed. Self-harming must also be reported.

CHILD ABUSE – ITS FORMS AND SYMPTOMS

Child abuse is identified in four forms: -

- Physical Abuse
- Negligent
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse

Physical abuse is defined as actual or likely physical injury to the child when there is evidence or reason to suspect that the injury or likely injury was deliberately inflicted or not prevented.

- o Physical abuse includes deliberate poisoning, suffocation, Munchausen's syndrome by proxy and female genital mutilation.
- o Further types of abuse are bruises, marks and other injuries that are likely to have been the result of considerable force, bites, burns and scalds.

Neglect is defined as persistent or severe neglect or a child resulting in impairment of the child health or development, including non-organic failure to thrive.

- o Neglect includes; exposure to danger including cold or starvation; repeated failure to do tend to the physical and developmental needs of the child including a failure to provide warmth or clothing or food or consistent care; failure to comply with recommended medical treatment.
- o Further indicators include; diarrhoea (persistent) where there is no medical cause; voracious appetite; lack of responsiveness (frozen attitude) in the child; abandonment or failure to properly supervise a child; failure to thrive.

Sexual abuse is defined as sexual exploitation of children under the age of 18; the involvement of developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities.

- o Sexual activities include those, which they do not comprehend; to which they are unable to give informed consent; that are illegal; that violate the norms of the family role.
- o A child is sexually abused when one or more persons involve the child in any activity for the purpose of their own sexual arousal; for criminal purposes, sexual abused relates to the age of consent of the child.
- o Any one may sexually abuse a child; family member; member of the family network; strangers; individuals in contact with the family; persons who have access to children through work (paid or voluntary).

Emotional abuse is defined as persistent or severe emotional ill treatment all rejection causes, or is likely to cause, an adverse effect on the emotional and behavioural development of the child.

- o Emotional abuse includes; repeated rejection of a child; chronic deprivation of access to social contact; repeatedly terrorising the child by threatening physical injury or abandonment.
- o Further indicators are; repeated or long term deprivation of positive parental attention; repeated or severe racial abuse by parent or carer; repeatedly witnessing domestic violence/bullying.

Do not forget that abuse can be inflicted by a range of adults and in a range of environments. It does not always take place it home and is not always by parents. For

example a child being a victim of a violent or sex crime is also a victim of abuse. Mentors should be aware that if a female mentee under the age of 16 reports that they have had sex, the law will regard this as non consensual and it must be reported to My Voice London. Self harm must also be reported.

Symptoms of Abuse

Staff and volunteers need to be aware of the potential sign and symptoms of abuse, observing the child is important, paying extra attention to behaviours, are the behaviours “normal” or could they indicate a deeper problem?

Think about the following:

- Changes in behaviour
- Injuries
- Reports of soreness
- Sexualised behaviour/language
- Poor school attendance/truancy
- Frequent A & E attendance
- Failed appointments/treatments
- Poor social skills (isolated child)
- Self harm/injury
- Reports by parents/carers
- Mental health concerns
- Clues in writing, drawing and play
- Child’s behaviour (reluctant to be seen alone)
- Inappropriate responses for the child
- Food/weight issues

What Stops Children Disclosing

- Our attitude towards them
- Loyalty to the abuser
- Not having the words
- Not wanting to be different
- Thinking it is normal or that it is their fault
- Think that people already know
- Fear of not being believed
- The consequences to the family

When working with children and young people information given should be treated as confidential. However, the young person needs to know that some information they disclose may have to be shared with the project co-coordinator/project manager.

Information given by children and young people will not be disclosed outside the project without the permission of the young person concerned, except when there is a child protection issue and where there is legal obligation to do so.

The golden rule is do not agree to take something in complete confidence. Suggest that you are willing to listen but you cannot guarantee complete confidence.

Sources: London Borough of Merton LEA
NSPCC
Save the Children UK
Charity Commission

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

My Voice London office hours are between 8.30 – 4.30 - 020 8545 2131

My Voice London Emergency out of hours contact details:

Emergency out of hours Social Services – Sutton & Merton 020 8770 5000

Kingston Police Station - 020 8541 1212

Sutton Police Station - 020 8643 1212

Wimbledon Police Station - 020 8947 1212